

# THE ROE TACTICAL TRAINING SEMINAR

## Combining Rules of Engagement and Marksmanship With Judgment-Based Training

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The replacement of sterile, garrison-based, end-of-phase critical task testing in Basic Combat Training (BCT) with realistic and relevant situational training exercises (STX) that contain embedded individual tasks has highlighted an unforeseen problem — Soldiers are having significant challenges quickly and accurately identifying threats and knowing when to apply deadly force. While the newly-implemented STX-based training initiatives provide Soldiers more experience prior to assignment to their unit — a unit most likely deploying or already deployed to combat — they have not necessarily departed the training base with the right lessons learned vis-à-vis making intuitive life or death decisions in the heat of battle. While the new BCT program of instruction (POI) includes rules of engagement (ROE) instruction, advanced rifle marksmanship, and STXs that seek to combine previous instruction into realistic scenarios, Soldiers in BCT continue to make inappropriate decisions with regard to threat identification and the application of deadly force during the STXs and during their final field training exercise (FTX).

When we began to peel the onion back, we found that many drill sergeants, even our combat veterans, were misinformed as to use of the ROE and when it's appropriate to use deadly force. Some of our veterans had commanders in combat that issued overly restricted ROE, while others had commanders who were much more receptive and supportive on the use of deadly force. All had problems with trying to apply complex and wordy ROE in the fraction of a second that tense and rapidly evolving situations allow. If this is a problem for our combat-seasoned drill sergeants, then it's a significant hurdle for those drill sergeants who have yet to deploy.



U.S. Army photos

*By integrating realistic and relevant situational training exercises into basic combat training, Soldiers are more prepared than ever before to immediately contribute to their units in combat.*

And if the cadre is unsure about when it's okay to kill bad guys, then the Soldiers surely will be. The following problems were routinely observed during STXs, until we fixed the problem with effective cadre training:

- ❑ Soldiers unjustifiably engaging civilians, while others were so hesitant to engage insurgents dressed in civilian clothes that they became casualties;

- ❑ Soldiers engaging critically wounded insurgents who posed no further threat; and, perhaps most importantly,

- ❑ Drill sergeants who lacked the requisite combination of legal knowledge and tactical skills to facilitate an after action review that thoroughly examines why the decisions were made.

As we have discovered over the past two years in our efforts to increase the tactical proficiency of the drill sergeants (regardless of their MOS), cadre training was the

answer. Though we did not have the expertise internally to train the cadre, we found a team of dedicated and extraordinarily competent professionals comprised of Judge Advocates (JAs) with combat, shooting, and special operations experience, federal law enforcement agents, local/state law enforcement personnel with extensive special operations (Special Weapons and Tactics [SWAT]) backgrounds and experience, Special Operations service members, and civilian self-defense instructors, to train the BCT and One Station Unit Training (OSUT) cadre at Fort Knox, Kentucky, on ROE and rules for the use of force.

What makes this training so unique is that it is the only structured training program in the armed services that combines ROE instruction with advanced pistol and rifle marksmanship, and judgment-based training. It begins with



*After training on quick fire techniques with live ammunition, Soldiers face unpredictable shoot/no shoot situations using Simunitions.*

extremely thought-provoking lectures on the tactical and legal applications of the use of force and use of force law; it then progresses to shoot/no-shoot situations using the engagement skills trainer, whereby the decisions are moderated by a tactically knowledgeable JA, and tactical pistol instruction. Tactically knowledgeable JAs with a background in close quarters shooting and strong shooting skills are essential to this program. Without this knowledge/skill base, the legal instruction will take on an academic and sterile flavor that is unhelpful to understanding decision-making in a dynamic close quarters tactical environment while under the threat of imminent death.

Building on this training, the team trains advanced rifle and pistol marksmanship using live ammunition to prepare the students for close quarters combat. The goal of this live-fire training is twofold:

- (1) To bring all students to a skill level that will enable them to benefit from the upcoming scenario-based Simunitions training, while at the same time ensuring safe, competent weapons handling in a close quarters environment; and
- (2) To place them in the correct mind-set to achieve the maximum benefit from the scenario-based Simunitions training. Because a Soldier's mindset changes once live ammunition is locked and loaded into their weapon, moving from a live fire range to the Simunitions training helps preserve that mentality, which exponentially increases the realism of the scenarios.

Once students have mastered marksmanship, they are prepared for the force-on-force, judgment-based training with Simunitions. Use of the Simunitions allows for realistic shoot/no-shoot decisions to be made with immediate feedback. The final phase of the

training is team and squad STXs in a shoot house and on a traffic control point using Simunitions. JAs facilitate the AAR for all Simunitions training, providing legal opinion on the shooter's decision as to when to use deadly force. Simply put, this is the best training I've had in 25 years of combat arms service.

Over four, two-and-a-half day iterations, the team trained nearly 100 instructors and drill sergeants, and the results were immediate. The cadre educated their peers, and the BCT and OSUT Soldiers are now making far more appropriate decisions during their STXs and during their final FTX. The ROE instruction has significantly improved, the AARs have improved, and the Soldiers are more prepared than ever before to leave BCT/OSUT to immediately and meaningfully contribute to their unit in combat.



*Building on their marksmanship and shoot/no shoot training, Soldiers conduct STXs with Simunitions in a shoot house during traffic control point operations.*

If you're interested in achieving the same positive impact on your unit, contact the ROE/RUF Tactical Training Seminar Course Director, Major Bolgiano (USAF), at [airbornerobocop@aol.com](mailto:airbornerobocop@aol.com) or DSN 243-6464.

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